

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE RE LISTENING (LGBTQI PEOPLE)**

### **PURPOSE**

The General Assembly in 2018 established the Special Committee re Listening (LGBTQI People) upon the recommendation arising from the work of the Committee on Church Doctrine and the Life and Mission Agency Committee in preparing to respond to the overtures regarding sexuality.

The special committee, over the next few years, is to create a safe and respectful environment in which confidentiality is assured in order to encourage LGBTQI people to tell their stories of harm done to them and to share their stories of God's grace experienced by them. Each year the committee is to report to the General Assembly with a final report being presented by 2020.

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

This is the second report of the Special Committee re LGBTQI Listening also known as Rainbow Communion. A final report will be presented in 2020. This report outlines the background and mandate of the Special Committee including changes to the mandate approved by the General Assembly in 2018 as well as changes in membership. The work of the committee over the previous year has included several meetings and presentations to various bodies within the church but the focus has been on hearing people's stories of harm done and grace experienced even in the midst of challenge by LGBTQI people and others in the face of homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy in the church. Most of these stories have been heard in face to face listening sessions but also by video, telephone and in written form.

Several themes have begun to emerge identified as: gratitude, the importance and pain of church community and trauma and barriers to healing. Many people have been encouraged by the Moderator's Letter of Repentance as a starting point but what has become clear is that many LGBTQI people and others have often been bereft of appropriate pastoral care in the face of harm done to them. Although the Special Committee will continue to identify themes and develop recommendations to bring to the General Assembly in 2020 for concrete actions addressing homophobia, hypocrisy, heterosexism and transphobia in the church, it is clear that steps need to be taken now to address the harm that has been done and continues to be done in the church.

The report contains a list of definitions of terminology and vocabulary related to gender identity, sexual orientation/attraction and related topics that are found and the terms of reference and from stories shared. These include: LGBTQI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Homophobia, Transphobia, Heterosexism, Hypocrisy, Ally, Asexual, Attraction, Biological Sex, Biphobia, Cisgender, Closeted, Coming out, Conversion or reparative therapy, Gender, Gender binary, Gender identity, Homosexual, Intersectionality, Lifestyle, Out, Preferred Gender Pronouns, Sexual orientation, Straight and Two Spirit. It is hoped that these definitions will assist the church to hear stories and to consider recommendations.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Consent Recommendations**

There are no consent recommendations.

#### **Next Steps (p. 312)**

As people have found the courage to tell their stories it has become clear that the need for rebuilding broken communities and relationships and to respond pastorally to those who have been harmed cannot wait for another year. It is evident that steps need to be taken now to create more welcoming and respectful spaces within congregations and other parts of the church so that all are able to tell their stories without fear and everyone can begin to walk in a more honest and pastoral way with one another. For many people the listening process has provided a first step to being able to tell their story and to begin a new relationship with others in the Church.

**Recommendation No. 1**

That congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church be urged to give public expression to the Moderator's Letter of Repentance and to seek ways to live out that repentance for harm done and that continues to be done, to LGBTQI people and others as a result of homophobia, hypocrisy, transphobia and heterosexism in The Presbyterian Church in Canada including developing discussion spaces with leadership drawn from a diversity of people.

**Recommendation No. 2**

That the Life and Mission Agency develop and gather resources to strengthen our ability to provide appropriate support to congregations, sessions, presbyteries, synods and other bodies of the church in developing models of pastoral care that recognize the gifts of all and encourage mutual support and care for those who have been harmed by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy.

In 2003 The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirmed that homosexual orientation is not a sin (A&P 2003, p. 526–47, 26, 34, 37–41, 43–45) and that studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for programs to change a person's sexual orientation (A&P 2003, p. 526–547, 26, 34, 37–41, 43–45). Of grave concern to the special committee is that some LGBTQI people have been deeply traumatized by attempts to change their orientation through so-called conversion or reparative therapy and that these programs are still being recommended and are seen by some to be a helpful pastoral response to LGBTQI people in the church.

**Recommendation No. 3**

That The Presbyterian Church in Canada reaffirm its statements that homosexual orientation is not a sin and that studies have not revealed any scriptural, scientific or pastoral basis or justification for programs to change a person's sexual orientation and therefore acknowledge that any form of conversion or reparative therapy is not a helpful or appropriate pastoral response to those who identify as LGBTQI.